

Georgia Library Quarterly

Volume 44 | Issue 4

Article 14

January 2008

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Amy Geisen

Aiken Technical College, geisena@atc.edu

Carol Waggoner-Angleton

Augusta State University, cwaggone@gru.edu

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Recommended Citation

Geisen, Amy and Waggoner-Angleton, Carol (2008) "Trading Libraries: Off with a Roar, but Will It Soar?," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 44 : Iss. 4 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol44/iss4/14>

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GO WHITE PAPER

Trading libraries: Off with a roar, but will it soar?

by Amy Geisen and Carol Waggoner-Angleton

Libraries are caught between that proverbial “rock and a hard place.” We want to provide opportunities for our librarians and staff to expand their training and make professional connections, but we can’t offer very many opportunities because of budget and time constraints. It is often difficult to find a venue that provides both an opportunity to address training issues and make professional connections. Workshops and conferences, both live and online, may address training needs and/or professional connections, but seldom do these venues address both of these needs effectively.

What is needed is a flexible program that could provide for these needs in a one-to-one relationship and, compared to the cost of the average conference or workshop, at relatively modest expense.

Trading Libraries is a program originally proposed by Callie McGinnis, dean of libraries at Columbus State University. The goals of the program are that librarians and staff would receive a “healthy and beneficial dose of professional development experience and ... make new professional connections [to] strengthen the library network.”¹ McGinnis claims she was actually inspired by TV programs like FOX’s “Trading Spouses” and ABC’s “Wife Swap.” More serious inspiration was derived from a job-shadowing experience with a fellow cataloger. The program, developed with three colleagues, had these basic guidelines:²

- ▶ A participant would shadow their counterpart from another University System of Georgia library
- ▶ The participant could be a librarian or staff member
- ▶ The swap would take place in the summer since this might be the least disruptive time to arrange a visit.

At the time of writing, 18 people have expressed an interest in participating in Trading Libraries.³

Literature search results

As participants, the authors wanted to gain as much from the experience as possible. We determined to look at similar programs to make sure we understood the goals of Trading Libraries and our responsibilities as participants. In looking at the literature, we found that this program had the potential to have points in common with formal and informal mentoring programs, leadership schools, job exchanges and job-shadowing.

Formal and informal mentoring programs

In an article on the different facets of mentoring, Jones-Quarley discusses different formats of mentoring.⁴ Mentoring programs are categorized into different formats.

- ▶ One on one
- ▶ Group mentoring
- ▶ Team mentoring

The goals of formal mentoring programs such as the American Library Association’s New Members Round Table, among other examples, are teamwork, enhanced employee commitment, development of leadership qualities and the cultivation of new ideas and creativity.

Informal mentoring arises out of networking and personal relationships and works best in giving support and advice on career growth. This type of mentoring is good for career coaching, support and advice.

Leadership schools

Library leadership schools are considered to be very intense training.⁵ These are residential training programs, lasting for days or, in some instances, weeks. Participants are accepted through nomination or application. The goals of these schools are to:

- ▶ Develop leadership skills

- ▶ Cultivate junior librarians to succeed to senior management positions
- ▶ Encourage participants to take on leadership activities in professional associations
- ▶ Develop professional networks

Job exchanges

The primary advantages of a job exchange are outlined in an article by Jonathan Tindale⁶:

- ▶ The participant learns new skills from a different [library] culture ... enhances the individual's professional development.
- ▶ The participant adapts their abilities to a new environment, bringing a tremendous professional boost to the individual's knowledge and experience.
- ▶ The participants will return professionally reinvigorated, with knowledge gained from their exchange strengthening their commitment and professional abilities.

Some other points to make about job exchanges are:

- ▶ They normally take place for six months to a year.
- ▶ Most of the literature focused on international job

exchanges, but the job exchange generally involved a geographic distance. The participants literally swap jobs for the specified time period.

Job shadowing

The premise of job shadowing is to learn about a company or career by experiencing it in the shadow of a working professional.⁷ The library literature on job shadowing described this as a method applied to middle and high school students to determine a career path.

However, Katharine Hansen points out that:

- ▶ Students see how textbook learning is applied in the real world.
- ▶ New career directions can be explored by job shadowing.
- ▶ Different job environments expose a person to different job cultures.

While there are glimmers of all these arrangements — mentoring, leadership school, job exchange and job shadowing — that could eventually develop from participation in Trading Libraries, the literature revealed two programs, "Let's Share Our Tennessee Libraries," a Tennessee Library Association (TLA) pilot program in 1985 and the MAALL (Mid-America Association of Law

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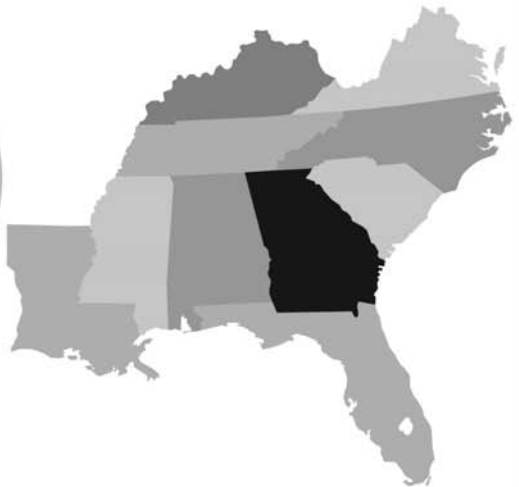
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Libraries) Staff Exchange Program, that had previously been attempted. These were similar to Trading Libraries in these ways:

- ▶ Exchanges were arranged between librarians working in the same field in different parts of the state/region.
- ▶ The purpose was to do in-depth observation on how another library or department operates.
- ▶ The focus is to trade information on strategies to deal with day-to-day operational challenges.
- ▶ The MAALL project included both professional and non-professional staff.

Participant experiences

In May, the director of Reese Library, Dr. William N. Nelson, made his staff aware of the Trading Libraries program. Staff who wished to participate submitted a short essay for evaluation. Once accepted, we were asked to determine which library to visit. Once the site had been agreed on, Dr. Nelson contacted the libraries in question, and when the directors were in agreement, the participants and the host departments worked out visit dates and details. Scheduling pushed our visit dates beyond the suggested month of July and into early August.

Carol's visit took place at Georgia College and State University on Aug. 2. GCSU's Special Collections staff, Nancy Davis Bray, associate director for Special Collections, and Christopher Ellis, archival associate, were excellent hosts. They talked about the guts, nuts and bolts of both Special Collections operations, including these topics:

- ▶ Security — GCSU can provide lockers for patrons' belongings. They discussed how key access for the lockers was managed and patron compliance with their use.
- ▶ Access — Augusta State University keeps a sign-in log for patrons and a manuscript log for patrons' use of manuscripts. GCSU goes a step farther, keeping visitor registration cards
- ▶ Permission to publish forms — Both institutions have formal documentation for this. GCSU shared the form used when patrons use items where ownership/copyright assignment is in doubt.
- ▶ Partnering with K-12 initiatives — An issue that Carol had interest in. Thanks to talking with Nancy and Chris, she is now aware that this is an area that has been a focus of the Board of Regents initiative. They discussed guidelines for projects, and Nancy recommended evaluating collections to use in these initiatives against the content of currently used middle school textbooks.
- ▶ Integrating Special Collections in the university curriculum — GCSU was able to have stronger

relationships with their English/literature department because of the presence of the Flannery O'Connor collection. General brainstorming on this issue ensued.

- ▶ Nancy made Carol aware of some grant possibilities Carol was unfamiliar with.
- ▶ Chris had just attended the Georgia Archives Institute and was able to fill Carol in on the scope of that program. He answered a lot of questions Carol had about sampling large collections, a practice she had read about but had never seen in practice.

As well as focusing on Special Collections, Nancy and Chris took Carol behind the scenes in all the library departments and in the museum to meet their colleagues. Carol appreciated the museum visit because it led to a fruitful discussion on mounting portable displays. Carol found out about the Georgia Women of Achievement display, which could be brought to her library for "free." A bonus was attending the staff training session on reference interviews that was being conducted the day of Carol's visit. She took all of these impressions home to her library's Inreach Committee, which is concerned with staff training.

Amy visited Armstrong Atlantic State University for her Trading Libraries experience on Aug. 8 and 9. Amy worked with Ann Fuller, head of circulation and ILLIAD; Harriet Winiger, library assistant (reserves and student training); Barbara Brown, interlibrary loan assistant; Melissa Jackson, interlibrary loan librarian; and Rob Jones, evening assistant and e-reserves. Among topics touched on were:

- ▶ Amy observed the overview of circulation duties, layout and workflow. She noticed some differences in how student responsibilities were handled.
- ▶ Student training was another important topic. Amy discussed AASU's student training method. This issue was important for both Harriet and Amy. Although they shared some similar training methods, Amy was able to share her experiences with LC Easy, a computer training program for shelf reading and LC classification. Harriet and Ann were interested in this program after hearing about it.
- ▶ Amy worked with Barbara on receiving and processing ILL requests. Amy was able to compare the two programs and point out the benefits of using ILLIAD to improve paperwork and workflow.
- ▶ Amy observed AASU's hard copy reserves and e-reserves. She noted the different method of using these reserve components and providing access for patrons.
- ▶ She discussed the differences in how each institution handled GIL Express requests. Amy learned a different method for tracking GIL requests and ensuring that GIL requests were not lost in shipping.

- ▶ Melissa was able to show Amy AASU's interface on OCLC and their system for borrowing in interlibrary loan. Melissa showed Amy how she collects and uses borrowing statistics to shape collection development.
- ▶ Amy met colleagues from other AASU library departments in her morning session. She had an especially fruitful visit with Richard Horah, media services. Richard was interested in a Trading Libraries visit to ASU.
- ▶ Amy and Ann discussed different methods for tracking circulation statistics. Amy was able to reflect on ASU's current circulation statistics and their usefulness for circulation workflow.
- ▶ Amy learned ways to market for improvement in students' awareness of the library and its importance on campus.

This run-down shows how this program helps address the unique problems and scenarios faced by staff working in different departments. Amy and Carol found they shared some common experiences as well.

- ▶ They both found it to be a very energizing experience, and they both came back with new ideas for performing and implementing common procedures.
- ▶ They both now suffer from "new library building envy." Both AASU's Lane Library and GCSU's Ina Dillard Russell Library have benefited from extensive rebuilding and remodeling. Both agreed they could channel this envy positively by serving on building committees if the opportunity arose.
- ▶ While they agreed that they came away with ideas to improve certain areas, this opportunity helped remind them of areas in which their own libraries were excellent.
- ▶ They both enjoyed the opportunity to network and collaborate with colleagues at other institutions.

Suggestions for participating individuals

- ▶ Go with the flow. Don't have a set of concrete expectations. This program is a good example of experiential learning. Participants need to be "in the moment rather than comparing what they are experiencing to what they were told they would experience."⁸
- ▶ Conversely, it doesn't hurt to have a list of questions written down. Participants are there to absorb as much information as possible, and a list will help make sure you have addressed everything in which you are interested. A site that can help you brainstorm about your list of questions is Quintessential Careers

Informational Interviewing Tutorial http://www.quintcareers.com/information_interview.html.

Suggestions for the success of Trading Libraries

- ▶ There needs to be more publicity. Directors may be aware of the program, but knowledge of it needs to trickle down to department heads and staff. Hosts need to be aware that they might be tapped to participate before they get a call from their director to let them know they had a Trading Libraries participant on the way.
- ▶ While participants' institutions will bear the travel costs, more collaboration needs to take place to keep these costs down. As an example, could participants be housed at host dormitory facilities?
- ▶ There should to be more dissemination of results and assessment. The guidelines could be expanded to include a requirement that participants report formally on their experiences to their libraries and to whichever individual or committee takes responsibility for the overall administration of the Trading Libraries Program.

Conclusions

The staff of Reese Library felt that this was a beneficial program, one in which they were proud to participate, and they would be pleased to advocate strongly on its behalf. The program offered participants a chance to network with colleagues and build on the successes of other libraries. It provides an opportunity to reflect on issues faced within their library and learn about opportunities for improvement on these issues. The Trading Libraries experience is a great opportunity for colleagues to support one another and build professional relationships.

However, in order for it to soar and grow, it needs to avoid what happened to the similar programs mounted by the TLA and the MAALL. Communications have been exchanged with these organizations to ascertain the status of the programs they initiated in the 1980s. At the time of writing, neither program was flourishing. Mr. Scott Cohen, Staff Development Committee, Tennessee Libraries Association, does not believe their program survived beyond 1986⁹. Mr. Brian Striman, past president of MAALL, was kind enough to do some digging for signs of the MAALL program.¹⁰

As of 2003, the Staff Development program had become part of the grants committee oversight, but no applications had been received since 2003. To quote Mr. Striman, the program "barely has a pulse." For Trading Libraries to soar and become a fixture in Georgia, there will need to be aggressive campaigning for support and participants. ►►

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